

Minutes of Town of Amherst Public Works Committee  
meeting of Thursday, December 16, 2004  
DPW building, 7:00pm

present: Doug Lowing, Steven Puffer, Rob Crowner, Guilford Mooring, Vince O'Connor

1. Minutes

Doug convenes the meeting at 7:15pm and distributes an agenda.

The committee reviews and accepts unanimously the minutes of the November 10, 2004 meeting. Approval of the minutes of the October meeting and the first meeting in November still needs attention. Guilford and Doug will track these down before the next meeting.

Doug would like to post preliminary versions of minutes on the town website even before they have been approved by the committee, so that the public can be aware of what the committee is doing in as timely a manner as possible. Guilford is not sure whether the IT department allows this, though Doug is certain he has seen draft minutes for other committees on the web. Pending determination of IT policy, the committee agrees to allow draft minutes to be posted when ready, with the proviso "Draft" clearly indicated at the top of the page.

2. Street acceptances

Guilford reports that some of the streets accepted by the Fall 2004 Town Meeting (Morrow Lane and the new subdivisions in Amherst Woods) lack streetlights at their intersections. They were constructed in accordance with plans approved in advance by the Planning Board; however, those plans included waiver of the streetlight requirement. The utilities in these locations are underground, so installing streetlights now would be difficult and/or expensive. The Amherst Hills subdivision currently being developed will have streetlights.

Doug asks whether there is a punch list that is reviewed by anyone before streets are submitted for acceptance. Guilford states that the DPW does have a punch list, and that the Select Board and Planning Board both review street conditions before they come before Town Meeting. In this case, however, streetlights had been waived from the punch list. Rob wonders about the reason the Planning Board granted the waiver, but this happened before Guilford came to Amherst, so he does not know.

3. Traffic studies

Doug would like to begin acting on the Amherst Woods discussion that the committee had at a recent meeting. Guilford reports that the DPW is preparing a list of pending traffic calming/engineering issues that have been brought to the attention of the department - among them Larkspur Drive, South Amherst Common, University Drive, Amity Drive, and Pomeroy Lane/West Street (there are a number of others as well). He intends to present this list to the committee at the next meeting for discussion and prioritization. There are different problems for each, and they are at varying levels of progress, but there is not enough in the budget to accomplish all of them at this time.

The South Amherst Common modeling study is already done and the cost is not very great, so this project may be the closest to proceeding. Vince mentions that the current signage at the South Amherst Common was offered by neighbors as an alternative to a perceived too-drastic proposal. Guilford notes that the only thing everyone agrees on is that there is a problem there.

Guilford states that the Select Board has requested a complete list of traffic issues under study, along with recommendations, by January 20, 2005. Doug would like to know the budget specifics when the committee evaluates them. Vince wants to know how the items on the list got there: What were the criteria for compiling the list? The committee should evaluate the criteria, not just the projects.

Doug suggests inviting the Amherst Woods neighbors to this discussion, but Rob states that every neighbor from each project should be invited if any are. Guilford will provide a preliminary list of projects to the group before the meeting, which could give an idea of how many people that might cover. Vince recommends scheduling the meeting far enough in advance to put a notice in the newspaper. The committee typically meets the first Tuesday of every month, but Doug suggests pushing this meeting back to January 11, to which the committee agrees.

Doug notes that among the issues to be considered is the possible implication that committing funds for design work would necessarily result in committing funds for construction. Vince notes that, conversely, construction money may already be available and a project may need only the commitment of design money to go forward. Guilford states that in many cases the "third E" of traffic calming - education - would be the most effective solution to a problem, but no one has responsibility for this avenue.

There is some informal discussion of traffic issues on University Drive and South Pleasant Street. These will be covered in more detail when the list is complete.

#### 4. Street acceptances (reprise)

Vince states that streetlights at intersections are important for the illumination of the street sign that enables people to figure out where they are in the dark. He proposes writing a letter to the Select Board describing the commentary the committee heard from Amherst Woods residents and requesting that waivers not be given for streetlights at intersections at least.

Doug asks whether there is anything that can be done about the streets not yet accepted in Amherst Woods. Guilford believes it is the Town's problem now, but notes that all other subdivisions currently in development will have lighting. It is the policy of the Select Board to require lights on sharp corners and at the end of cul-de-sacs.

Vince asks the chair to draft letters to the Planning Board requesting it not grant streetlight waivers, and to the Select Board requesting that it not allow this to happen. Doug agrees to bring drafts to the next meeting.

#### 5. Sewer extensions

Vince asks whether there are any sewer extensions contained in the sewer capital plan. Guilford believes sewers are not in the committee's charge, but agrees to discuss it. He states that road repair after sewer work cannot be paid for from Chapter 90 funds; it must come from the sewer enterprise fund. However, if the road was already scheduled for work, some Chapter 90 funds may be contributed.

Vince inquires about the proposed Shays Street sewer line, which could force residents downhill from the line to install a pump in order to tie in to it. A pump would be expensive and vulnerable to power outage. Guilford explains that since the water lines on Shays Street are being redone, for reasons of convenience the DPW intends to install sewer lines at the same time. The residents, who currently have septic systems, would not be required to tie in immediately. However, Vince notes that the Board of Health could require tie-in in case of septic system failure, even though that might end up costing more than replacement of the septic system. Guilford estimates that a septic system costs about \$20,000 every 20-30 years, while the pump to which Vince referred

would cost about \$5,000 every 10-15 years. Vince wonders whether the committee should ask the Select Board to exempt those on the south side of Shays Street from having to tie in in the future. Guilford recommends letting the Select Board make its own decision about that. Doug suggests that the committee might at least raise the issue for the Select Board to consider and agrees to draft a memo about this for the committee to review at its next meeting.

#### 6. South Amherst block grant

Vince reports that a block grant in the range of \$200,000-600,000 may become available for improvement of the Pomeroy Lane housing co-op, only 20% of which need be committed to social services. He asks the committee to consider whether public works-related projects in the Pomeroy Lane/West Street area should be submitted for inclusion in the block grant request. Such work would have to be demonstrated to be for the benefit of the residents of the housing co-op. He suggests bus pulloffs, business handicap accessibility, and sidewalk improvement as potential elements of a request.

Guilford reports that in an initial meeting among town officials about the grant request, DPW suggestions were rejected because of the lack of an overall public works plan or priority list. However, Vince states that the Select Board will be making the decisions about what to include in the request, so there might be an opportunity for public works to be included. The first Select Board hearing on it is scheduled for next Monday, December 20, and the application is due March 1, 2005. He asks that the committee allow him to make a preliminary presentation on its behalf to the Select Board, with more detailed information to be provided in time for the Select Board's January 24, 2005 meeting. The basis of the PWC proposal will be for design work for improvements to the intersection. The committee agrees to ask Vince to pursue this.

#### 7. Agenda for next year

Guilford reports that the streets and sidewalks inventory will be presented to the Select Board in January. It will then be referred to the Public Works Committee for development of a priority list. Guilford will explain how the grading system works and review a preliminary list of priorities. This list may be considered very fluid.

Steve would prefer to maintain a consistent schedule for meeting days: the first Tuesday of the month. After the already-agreed January 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, the next two meetings would be February 1<sup>st</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Vince would like to discuss streetlights, possibly at the February meeting. Guilford agrees to bring in a sample streetlight for the committee to inspect.

Vince distributes a letter to the Select Board that he drafted regarding reducing traffic idling on town ways, asking that the committee discuss it at a future meeting.

Guilford states that Chapter 90 money does not come from the gas tax in Massachusetts, unlike in most other states. This means that the amount available does not fluctuate based on the price of gas or amount of miles driven in the state. Sidewalk work cannot be paid by Chapter 90 money unless it is incidental to actual street work. It is generally not a good idea to work on a street just to cover adjacent sidewalk work with Chapter 90. Beginning in 2007, the capital program calls for \$30,000 in sidewalk repair annually.

Doug asks whether identifying a road as a problem in the inventory makes it a legal liability. Guilford believes that having a plan or a list demonstrates due diligence in addressing the problem, and states that cautionary signs can be posted on especially bad roads.

Guilford states that public hearings will be needed for the chosen traffic calming projects, and suggests that these can be combined with regular monthly committee meetings.

Steve moves to adjourn the meeting at 9:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rob Crowner